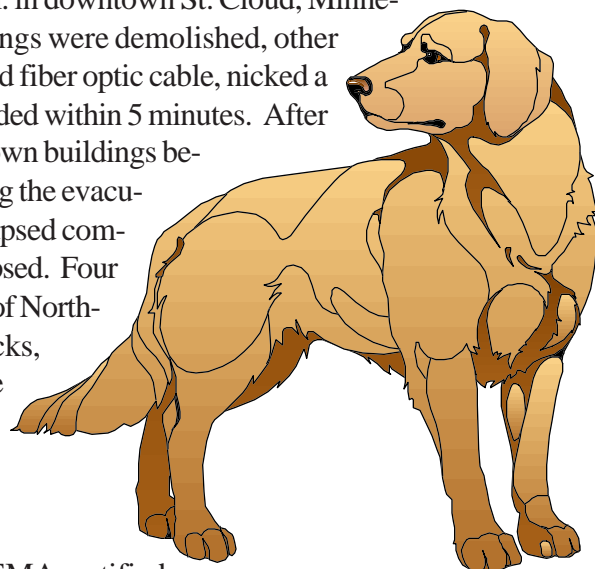




## Louie, NETF-1 Advanced Certified FEMA Disaster Dog, Located a Body after a Natural Gas Explosion Destroyed Three Downtown Buildings

Submitted By: Amy Rising

Gas caused an explosion on Friday, December 11, 1998 at 11:30 a.m. in downtown St. Cloud, Minnesota - a city of 75,000. The blast area covered a city block, 3 buildings were demolished, other buildings were damaged beyond repair. Workers laying underground fiber optic cable, nicked a natural gas pipeline, and a Northern States Power emergency responded within 5 minutes. After getting an elevated gas meter reading, evacuation of the busy downtown buildings began. The explosions occurred in the basement of a pizza parlor during the evacuation. The pizza parlor had apartments on the second floor and collapsed completely. An adjacent law office building and a are were partially collapsed. Four people were killed, 5 were injured. Two of the dead were employees of Northern States Power Co. The explosion hurled debris and glass for blocks, shook buildings and caused evacuation of a six block area where there were hundreds of office workers and high school students.



Our canine search team consisted of:

Mike Agnew - Canine Search Specialist, Search Team Manager

Amy Rising - Canine Search Specialist, and Louie, an advanced FEMA certified disaster dog

Kathy Newman and Bo, a trailing dog

Charlie Ek and Soda, a wilderness dog

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## Febreze Warning



Febreze, a new product that is used to get odors out of fabrics, has been causing deaths and illness in dogs and birds. There have been multiple instances reported in the past few weeks of dogs and birds dying after Febreze was used anywhere near them. Some dogs have only gotten very ill, but some have died. Several birds have died as well. Febreze contains zinc chloride, which is the culprit. If you have recently sprayed your dog's bed with this product, please wash it until you get all of the Febreze out, or get your dog new bedding. Please pass the word along to your friends so we can prevent further deaths.

This was a notice from the Veterinary Emergency Center in Needham, MA.

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Our credentials were explained to the St. Cloud Fire department. We told them that Louie was trained to find people fast in rubble. We began our initial hasty search of the collapsed pizza parlor. I started Louie at the sidewall and directed him down into the rubble. He began working the area near the buildings north wall. Louie immediately tried to penetrate down along the wall. I entered the rubble at this time and tried to assist Louie into a small void without success. I noted that this area should be considered a prime search area. After describing the area to the search dog team manager, we sent in a back up dog to confirm scent in this area.

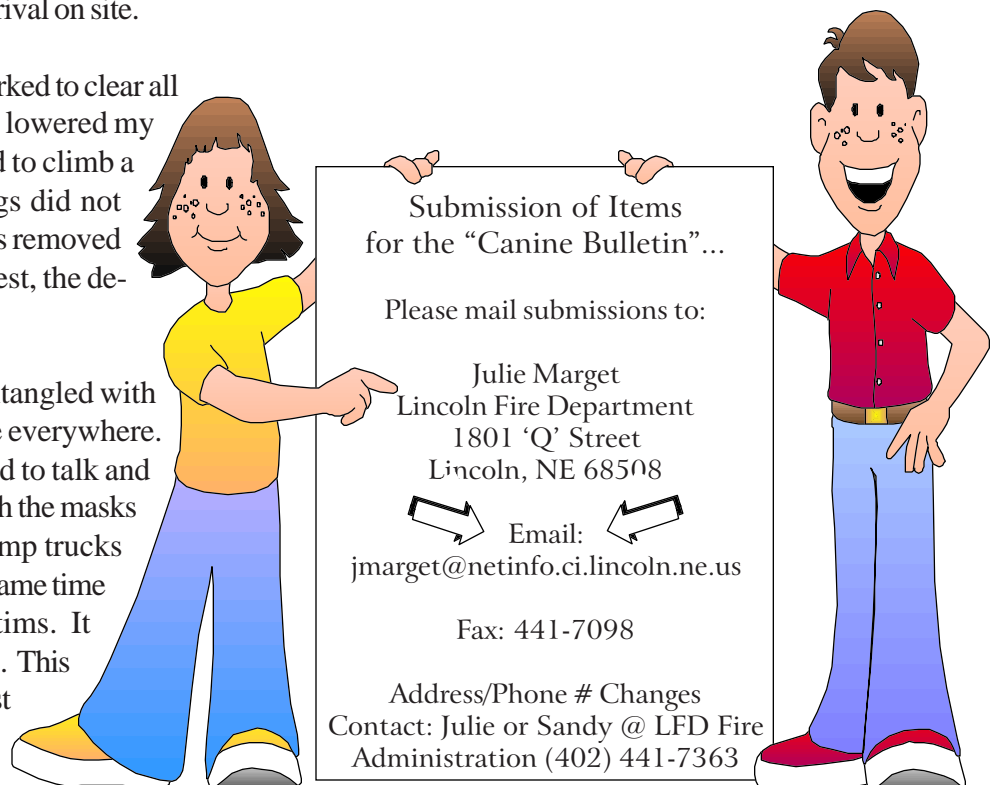
During the initial hasty search, I moved into the remaining area rubble. Firefighters were cutting a hole in what remained of the roof of the law office building to get into an inaccessible room. I was asked if I could check the hole. I explained the fire department that I could direct my dog up to the roof, then to the hole and I would not need to go up myself at this time. I hoisted Louie up about shoulder level onto the roof as bricks and debris fell off. The roof had collapsed on the north side but was intact on the south side. I sent Louie up toward the south and then directed him east toward the hole. He checked the hole without interest. Next Louie and I crawled through the front window of this building. The law office was dark and wet with many separated rooms. The firefighters had areas in this building that they wanted the dog to check. One of these rooms was blocked by a slanted sheet rock wall. The firefighters tore a hole through this. I hoisted Louie up and sent him through the hole onto what looked like one big shoulder high pile of debris, desks, computers, ceiling tiles, books and bookcases. He checked this out and was ready to go on to the next area. Throughout the building the wreckage was so deep you could not see the floor and crawling over it was daunting. In the next officer Louie sniffed a chair with interest. An injured person had been rescued from this chair earlier.

During the hasty search debriefing, I recommended the debris be removed from the NW wall of the pizza parlor building so Louie could get in and check the area out further. The trailing dog, Bo, also had shown interest in the NW wall. We stood nearby while firefighters removed this debris by hand. The firefighters found a deceased tenant. This person had lived in one of the upstairs apartments. Due to the Canine interest shown, the firefighters focus their effort to this area and the victim was found within 30 minutes of our arrival on site.

On removal of the tenant, the dogs worked to clear all area of humane scent. At one point I lowered my dog into a pit in the rubble and he had to climb a 12 foot ladder to get out. If the dogs did not have interest in an area, the rubble was removed with a back hoe, if the dogs had interest, the debris was removed carefully by hand.

Great big piles of unstable rubble, entangled with rebar, electrical cables and dust, were everywhere. We wore dust masks and found it hard to talk and give verbal commands to our dogs with the masks on. Back hoes, front loaders and dump trucks were working in the same areas at the same time that the dogs were searching for victims. It was noisy and dusty with many hazards. This made the dog handler relationship almost totally a hand signal, directional environment. We had an experienced

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search team manager to communicate and plan with the fire department and the dog teams. This was helpful considering working a dog and watching other dogs work would have been very difficult. I have worked with the St. Cloud Police Department on a missing person search, but this was the first time I worked with this city's fire department. I found them very accepting of the dogs and helpful in implementing the search plan. At one time, they helped me direct my dog into an area. I never thought of this as an option and have some reservations about it, but during this search it seemed quite natural and came in very handy as Louie responded without any problem. The weather was clear. Sunset was at 4:32 p.m. Temperature was 27 F with a low predicted to be 29 F. This was unusually warm weather for Minnesota in December. One final search was completed for any human scent and the search was called off. The dogs worked until about 8:30 p.m. My prior Urban Search and Rescue training helped me feel confident during this search. Louie had to do many of the activities that he has been trained and tested on. If I did not believe in my dog's ability, this search would have been very hard for me. I trusted my dog to cover all the areas so no victims were left in the search site.

Important reasons a canine helped during the St. Cloud gas explosion:

1. Locate live victims fast for better chance of survival. None were found.
2. Locate an area to focus on for recovery of any deceased victim. One was found.
3. Clear areas free of human scent so debris could be removed quickly from these areas, exposing deeper areas for additional search.

Web Pictures and information (St. Cloud Times)  
<http://www.sctimes.com>

## Canine Search Team Type II Evaluation, Miami, Florida

Florida Task Force 1 will host a Type II (Basic) Canine Search Team Evaluation in Miami, Florida on June 5-6, 1999. This evaluation will follow the procedures outlined in the recently approved Disaster Canine Readiness Evaluation process.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has sanctioned this process, but all candidates expenses are the responsibility of the sponsoring Task Force. For more information please contact John Huff at 441-8351.

## Do You Have an Email Address??

If you provide us with your current email address, we will make sure to include you in the Task Force email list. We frequently send information out to Task Force team members using this method. Please send you email address to [mdarrington@email.ci.lincoln.ne.us](mailto:mdarrington@email.ci.lincoln.ne.us).



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